United Nations A/60/281

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 August 2005

Original: English

Sixtieth session
Items 66 and 133 of the provisional agenda*

Advancement of women

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the audit of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women**

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted a follow-up audit at the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in December 2004, which generally covered the period from September 2001 to December 2004 and focused on the period from December 2003 to December 2004. The primary objective of the audit was to determine the implementation status of recommendations contained in the report on INSTRAW submitted by OIOS to the General Assembly in April 2002 (A/56/907), which addressed various issues concerning the sustainability and effectiveness of the Institute. On the basis of the acute financial difficulties of the Institute, OIOS had recommended in its previous report that the working group on the future operation of INSTRAW, established by the General Assembly primarily to develop recommendations to ensure the viability of the Institute, consider the option of closing INSTRAW. This option was rejected by the working group and the General Assembly. The OIOS follow-up audit therefore focused on issues relating to the sustainability of INSTRAW.

* A/60/150.

** The present report could not be submitted prior to the deadline because the review had not been concluded at that time.

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Overall, the OIOS follow-up audit showed that, although there have been some improvements in the governance structure of INSTRAW with the establishment of an executive board, further improvements are needed with regard to strengthening programmatic and administrative oversight of the Institute. In the view of OIOS, the Secretary-General should initiate consideration by intergovernmental bodies of ways to strengthen the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (of which INSTRAW is a member), for example by delegating some formal authority to the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, as Chair of the Network, for programme coordination beyond facilitation and sharing of information. Also, the role of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs with respect to the Director of INSTRAW was essentially advisory because the autonomous status of the Institute provides the Director with a high degree of independence with regard to utilizing resources allocated to INSTRAW.

Although the working group on the future operation of INSTRAW recommended the abolishment of the Institute's autonomous status, OIOS noted that this step had not been reflected in the revised INSTRAW statute approved by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/57. In this regard, INSTRAW has been increasingly relying on United Nations regular budget funding for most of its core requirements.

Regarding the implementation of the INSTRAW programme of work, OIOS found that outputs in 2004 were limited to interim documents or updated materials. Further, a training strategy had not been implemented, and there was a need to improve website management

On the basis of its follow-up audit, OIOS is recommending a series of improvements in the strategic, programmatic and administrative management of INSTRAW.

I. Introduction

1. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) was established in 1976 by the Economic and Social Council as an autonomous institute within the framework of the United Nations. Since 1983, INSTRAW headquarters has been located in the Dominican Republic on premises donated by the host country.

2. The present report is based on a follow-up review conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) during December 2004, which generally covered the period from September 2001 to December 2004 and focused on the period from December 2003 to December 2004. The primary objective of the review was to determine the implementation status of recommendations contained in the previous report of OIOS to the General Assembly on INSTRAW (A/56/907), in which it addressed various issues concerning the sustainability and effectiveness of the Institute. Before the previous OIOS report was issued, the General Assembly, in its resolution 56/125 of 19 December 2001, established the working group on the future operation of INSTRAW, primarily to develop recommendations to ensure the viability of the Institute. As part of its work, the working group reviewed the findings and recommendations contained in the previous OIOS report. Specifically, four of the OIOS recommendations were in the form of proposals for consideration by the working group, which supported the views of OIOS regarding the reconstitution of the INSTRAW Board of Trustees and the need to review the Institute's autonomous status and the continuation of financial support from the regular budget. As discussed below, however, the working group disagreed with the recommendations to further consider the option of closing INSTRAW. The working group's recommendations are contained in its report to the General Assembly of 16 August 2002 (A/57/330).

II. The role of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

3. In its previous report, OIOS recommended that the Secretary-General instruct his Special Representative for INSTRAW to propose to the working group that it consider the option of closing the Institute. The working group considered and rejected this option on the grounds that closing a United Nations institute located in a developing country would send the wrong political signal. Also, given that gender issues were at the top of the United Nations agenda, the working group felt it would be inconsistent to close down the Organization's only institute devoted to research and training in respect of the advancement of women and gender equality.

4. INSTRAW is one of four United Nations entities specializing in the promotion of gender equality. As mentioned above, it is specifically mandated to carry out research and training concerning the advancement of women. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for promoting, facilitating and monitoring gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations system. The Special Adviser chairs the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, which monitors and oversees the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the normative and operational work of the United Nations system. Also within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Division for the Advancement of Women participates in the development of policies for gender advancement within

the United Nations system and services the Commission on the Status of Women. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) provides financial and technical assistance to programmes on women, especially those regarding human rights, political participation and economic security.

5. In addition to the entities discussed above, the United Nations regional commissions, most funds and programmes and specialized agencies are also substantially involved in gender advancement work through their thematic programmes. They include the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, all of which have programmes in gender advancement. In addition, some United Nations training or research entities have a thematic focus on gender issues. For example, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research has developed a training programme on the special needs of women and children in and after conflict, and the United Nations University offers training on gender, conflict and education. Therefore, in the view of OIOS, all of those entities overlap with INSTRAW with regard to research and training in gender issues.

6. *The Director of INSTRAW stated that she had made extensive efforts to coordinate with other United Nations agencies in order to synergize policy and programmatic activities. In addition, INSTRAW is a member of United Nations-Energy and various other groups, such as the task force for the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on violence against women. INSTRAW also signed a memorandum of agreement with UNFPA, through which the Institute has received $30,000 towards its research on gender, migration and remittances.*

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women 2002-2005 (E/CN.6/2001/4) discusses the development of women's issues under several thematic clusters, including poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, and women and the economy. Specific entities, such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM, have become specialized and are responsible for comprehensive coverage of a limited number of specific themes. On the other hand, the activities of INSTRAW are and continue to be dispersed thinly among a variety of those themes, since under each the Institute is responsible for only one or two narrowly defined activities. For example, under violence against women, INSTRAW was tasked with developing an online training manual on men's roles in ending gender-based violence and with conducting online training. In the opinion of OIOS, the ability of INSTRAW to develop expertise in any particular area is extremely limited under the current circumstances.

8. *INSTRAW stated that it considers coordination with the United Nations system on gender equality and the empowerment of women a top priority. The Institute's proposed strategic framework for 2004-2007 was circulated among and discussed with all the members of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and reflects the feedback of several members of the Network who sent suggestions.* OIOS found that the strategic framework describes the objectives in terms so generic and brief that they could be universally applied to the work of any of the Network members. For example, the strategic framework's second objective states that INSTRAW should strengthen national capacities to effectively manage gender-related knowledge to support Governments and civil society in their efforts to mainstream gender into policies and programmes.

9. In 2001, INSTRAW developed its Gender Awareness Information Networking System (GAINS), which uses information and communication technology tools to conduct research and training. Meanwhile, other entities have also developed their own information and communication technology tools to promote networking. In particular, the WomenWatch website, maintained by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is featured in the April 2004 report of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality as the primary means to facilitate future online discussions of all critical areas of concern and emerging issues. In this area also, the networking role of INSTRAW is not prominent.

10. In discussions with OIOS, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women expressed the view in May 2005 that INSTRAW could build further on the work of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which publishes trends and statistics in *The World's Women* every five years. INSTRAW could, for example, create benchmark statistics and criteria to measure the actual implementation of gender mainstreaming in areas such as violence against women. However, INSTRAW has not been responsive to this suggestion. *INSTRAW stated that it was unable to continue its pioneering work on statistics and indicators as a result of budget constraints and not because it was unresponsive to the suggestion of the Special Adviser. Since that time, the issues of sex-disaggregated statistics and gender indicators have been comprehensively and ably addressed by the Statistics Division, all five of the regional economic commissions and a number of other United Nations entities.* OIOS has not assessed the substantive value of the Special Adviser's suggestion, but is concerned that the Special Adviser's leadership as overseer of the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the work of the United Nations remains largely theoretical (see recommendation 1).

11. Based on the INSTRAW case, OIOS is of the view that the Secretary-General should initiate consideration by intergovernmental bodies of ways to strengthen the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (of which INSTRAW is a member) for example, by delegating to the Special Adviser, as Chair of the Network, some formal authority for programme coordination beyond facilitation and sharing of information (see recommendation 2).

12. *INSTRAW stated that at the time of the resumed first session of its Executive Board (October 2004), when the Institute's current programme of work was presented and approved, the new incumbent for the post of Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women had not yet taken office. Similarly, the post was vacant at the time of the July session of the Executive Board. The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women participated in the Executive Board meetings in 2004. The current incumbent of the post of Special Adviser participated in the second session of the INSTRAW Executive Board (June 2005), during which the Institute's programme of work for 2006 was presented and approved.*

13. *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs confirmed that the role of the Special Adviser is to counsel the Secretary-General on gender and to facilitate inter-agency collaboration and coordination to achieve gender equality and integrate gender perspectives in all programmes and policies. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality is an inter-agency coordination body whose goal is to facilitate and coordinate system-wide efforts to mainstream gender into all programmes and policies of the United Nations system. Its members are*

bound by their mandates, as endorsed by their respective governing bodies, and the Special Adviser, as Chair of the Network, therefore does not have the authority to prescribe programmatic direction to the Network's members. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs further agreed that the Special Adviser could support the development of the Institute's programme of work and stronger linkages between INSTRAW and the other members of the Network in her role as Chair of the Inter-Agency Network. This would actually be helpful to ensure that the research work of INSTRAW benefits the whole system.

III. Autonomy and accountability

14. In its previous report, OIOS recommended that the Secretary-General instruct his Special Representative for INSTRAW to propose to the working group that it examine (a) the feasibility of the Institute's continuation as an autonomous body within the framework of the United Nations; and (b) the strategy for achieving effective autonomy for INSTRAW through the appropriate delegation of authority. In its review of this issue, the working group concluded that while the autonomous status was in principle desirable for a research institute and most probably was beneficial when INSTRAW was first established, it was at this time a major disadvantage for the Institute and should therefore be abolished. However, contrary to the working group's conclusion, the revised INSTRAW statute approved by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/57 did not abolish its autonomous status.

15. OIOS had recommended that the Secretary-General propose to the General Assembly that it consider the need to continue temporary funding of the Institute's core operations from the United Nations regular budget until the Working Group completed its in-depth assessment of the Institute and made its final recommendations concerning its sustainability, should the working group study not be completed before the end of the General Assembly's fifty-sixth session. Recently, however, INSTRAW has been relying increasingly on United Nations regular budget funding for almost all of its requirements. For 2005, an advance of $546,200 has been released against an annual committed subvention of $1,092,400.

16. In addition, OIOS had recommended that the Secretary-General instruct his Special Representative for INSTRAW to propose to the working group that it consider improvements to the Institute's Board of Trustees. Those improvements included possible reconstitution of the Board to include donor representation or, alternatively, replacing the Board with a consultative committee, thereby ensuring that the Institute's primary oversight and fund-raising functions would be effectively carried out. The revised INSTRAW statute reconstituted the Board of Trustees into the current Executive Board, composed of representatives of 10 Member States elected by the Economic and Social Council for three-year terms. The Executive Board also has eight ex officio members from the United Nations system, including the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Director of INSTRAW, a representative from the host country and one representative from each of the five regional commissions. The Executive Board was established in 2004 and met once in July and once in October 2004. It has established its own rules of procedure and has approved the Institute's strategic plan and programme of work. The Director submits annual and ad hoc reports on the Institute's activities and the execution of its work programme to the Executive Board.

17. OIOS had further recommended that the Secretary-General spell out the roles and responsibilities of his Special Representative for INSTRAW with a clearly defined delegation of authority. That recommendation was formulated to address the need for an administrative focal point within the United Nations Secretariat specifically to oversee the resolution of the acute problems experienced by INSTRAW over the past decade. In the revised INSTRAW statute, the previous reference to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been replaced with a reference to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. However, other than serving as an ex officio member of the INSTRAW Executive Board, the roles and responsibilities of the Under-Secretary-General were not detailed. OIOS therefore considers this recommendation as not having been implemented.

18. OIOS is concerned that oversight of the day-to-day operations of INSTRAW continues to be inadequate. For example, although the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs approves the INSTRAW Director's travel, his role remains essentially advisory because the autonomous status of INSTRAW provides a large degree of independence to the Director with regard to utilizing resources allocated to the Institute. No travel requests were denied, although OIOS determined that the Director's travel could have been curtailed in order to ensure greater management oversight of programme effectiveness by the Director at the Institute's headquarters in Santo Domingo.

19. *INSTRAW noted that administrative oversight is ensured through its Executive Board, the Executive Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the Controller and the Office of Human Resources Management, through whom all management decisions and activities are channelled.*

20. *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs stated that it should be noted that the statute of the Institute does not assign any supervisory role to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs with regard to INSTRAW. The oversight role of the Board, in which the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is just one among several ex officio members, is fundamental to the management of the Institute (see article III of the statute). As per article VII of the statute, the Department facilitates the provision of administrative support to the Institute on behalf of the Secretary-General by providing guidance on relevant rules, regulations, policies and procedures. The approval role of the Department with respect to the Director's travel requests is only to ensure that travel is in line with the approved strategy and programme of work.*

21. In the opinion of OIOS, the Institute's administrative accountability system should be improved by assigning overall administrative supervisory responsibility on behalf of the Secretary-General to one of the Secretariat members of the INSTRAW Executive Board (preferably the Department of Economic and Social Affairs or the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which is located in the same region as INSTRAW). This would ensure that the administrative decisions of the Director of INSTRAW are properly overseen by a representative of the Secretary-General in the Secretariat in accordance with the United Nations rules and procedures (see recommendation 3).

IV. Implementation of the programme of work

22. OIOS noted that the Institute's outputs in 2004 were generally limited to preliminary project proposals, brief notes, discussions or progress reports, which do

not constitute research products per se. Some of those documents were based on existing materials, as in the case of the publication on financing for development cited on the INSTRAW website, which had been prepared in 2003 (see recommendation 4).

23. *INSTRAW stated that it had gone on to develop concept papers on gender and remittances and gender and security sector reform. The concept paper on gender and financing for development already exists. In addition, throughout 2004, INSTRAW was still engaged in a revitalization and review process that required the identification of specific programmatic areas and the development of project proposals. The Institute is supposed to be funded entirely by voluntary contributions which, unless they are freely given by Member States, must be solicited through specific project proposals. Given the Institute's lack of funds and its increasing reliance on United Nations regular budget funding, the development of those project proposals was deemed to be: (a) a priority in the search for funding; and (b) necessary for the effective continuation of the Institute's research work.*

24. In 2003, the staff of INSTRAW prepared a draft training strategy that was not implemented because the then-Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women believed that the strategy should be reviewed by the new INSTRAW Director, who reported for duty in December 2003. However, at the time of the OIOS audit in December 2004, the training strategy had not been implemented (see recommendation 5).

25. In its previous report, OIOS recommended that the interim Director of INSTRAW evaluate GAINS and refocus the project before proceeding with further implementation. The statistics provided by INSTRAW as at May 2004 showed that membership in GAINS tended to be stable, with marginal increases and decreases, as was the case with regard to the number of database items and subscribers to newsletters. Among other activities, two new virtual seminar series were held in 2004, on gender security sector reform and gender and conflict prevention and resolution. However, OIOS noted that INSTRAW had not systematically monitored activities following the virtual seminars.

26. The Director and staff of INSTRAW explained that they did not view GAINS as being very conducive to networking or research, and that their focus had been on establishing a new website. In May 2004, INSTRAW undertook a review and reformulation of GAINS in order to optimize its usefulness and efficiency for members and for the Institute's implementation of its new priorities and programme of work (the 2004-2007 strategic framework). INSTRAW officials advised that the primary change was that the Gender Awareness Information Networking System would no longer be a product but rather a methodology of work to improve the quality of the Institute's research, the impact of its training and the reach of its information and dissemination activities.

27. The INSTRAW website was redesigned to ensure that it would be more user-friendly, and the new website was launched in July 2004. Website usage data showed an increase in the number of visits between July and December 2004 to the English, Spanish and French versions. Statistics regarding top pages visited and documents downloaded showed that user interest existed in a variety of subjects. However, because statistics for the period prior to July 2004 were not available, OIOS could not determine whether there had been an increase in user interest in comparison with the period prior to July 2004 and, if so, what the nature and extent of this increase was.

28. At the time of the OIOS audit in December 2004, INSTRAW had started but not completed the migration and linkage to the new website of the existing database, consisting of a total of 5,316 records. Users therefore could not access the library containing the documents created and stored over the years. The database supporting the new website consists of 2,602 pages and downloadable documents and is using only five per cent of available capacity (see recommendation 6).

V. Administrative and financial management

29. In its previous report, OIOS recommended that INSTRAW ensure that: (a) core staff members supervise consultants; (b) each consultant be hired for specific assignments with clear terms of reference and measurable output in accordance with United Nations regulations and rules; (c) consultant emoluments be determined on the basis of set criteria commensurate with the engagement; and (d) the number of consultants be reduced to the minimum required to maintain the website and the project. OIOS found that with the exception of item (b) above, those recommendations had generally been addressed by INSTRAW. In this regard, the OIOS review showed that of 25 existing contracts, those of 9 individuals were for ongoing rather than temporary work, although there should have been no continuing need to hire the same consultants under United Nations regulations and rules (see recommendation 7).

VI. Recommendations

30. As a result of its follow-up audit, OIOS originally formulated six recommendations in its draft report concerning the strategic, programmatic, financial and administrative management of INSTRAW. However, based on the comments received from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and INSTRAW on the draft report, OIOS has revised some of the recommendations and increased from two to three the number of recommendations addressed to the Secretary-General.

Recommendation 1

31. OIOS recommends that the Secretary-General propose to the Economic and Social Council that, in consultation with the INSTRAW Executive Board, it ensure that the Institute's programme of work is developed in consultation with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to take advantage of opportunities for synergy within the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and to reduce overlap with other programmes (AH2004/540/01/01).[1]

32. *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs stated that this would actually be helpful to ensure that the research work of INSTRAW benefits the whole system.*

Recommendation 2

33. OIOS recommends that the Secretary-General propose to the Economic and Social Council that it consider ways to strengthen the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, of which INSTRAW is a member, through such steps

[1] The symbols in parentheses in this section refer to an internal code used by OIOS for recording recommendations.

as delegating some formal authority to the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to coordinate programmes of Network members. In redefining this role, it should be recognized that coordinating Network members' programmes, in some instances, may go beyond facilitation and information-sharing (AH2004/540/01/02).

34. The *Department of Economic and Social Affairs stated that the role of the Special Adviser was to counsel the Secretary-General on gender and to facilitate inter-agency collaboration and coordination to achieve gender equality and integrate gender perspectives in all programmes and policies. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality is an inter-agency coordination body whose goal is to facilitate and coordinate system-wide efforts to mainstream gender into all programmes and policies of the United Nations system. The members of the Network are bound by their mandates as endorsed by their respective governing bodies, and the Special Adviser, as Chair of the Network, therefore does not have the authority to prescribe programmatic direction to the Network's members.*

35. *At the same time, in her role as Chair of the Inter-Agency Network, the Special Adviser could support the development of the Institute's programme of work and stronger linkages between INSTRAW and the other members of the Inter-Agency Network.*

36. OIOS acknowledges the comments of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which, inter alia, reflect the constraints of the governing framework of individual members of the Inter-Agency Network. However, OIOS believes that strengthening the authority of the Special Adviser as the Chair of the Network to coordinate beyond facilitation and information-sharing would make the Network more effective in accomplishing its goal of coordinating system-wide efforts to mainstream gender into all programmes and policies of the United Nations system.

Recommendation 3

37. OIOS recommends that in order to clarify and strengthen the administrative accountability system of INSTRAW, the Secretary-General propose to the Economic and Social Council that it assign an administrative supervisory role to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs or the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (AH2004/540/01/03).

38. *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs commented that in the context of the statute, the Economic and Social Council had the authority to clarify the roles of the members of the Board, including the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the five Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions. While the Secretary-General could recommend in his forthcoming report to the General Assembly that the Economic and Social Council embark on a review/revision of the statute, it may be counterproductive, as the statute was approved only recently (Council resolution 2003/57) and its renegotiation may encroach on broader issues of United Nations institutional reform.*

39. OIOS acknowledges the comments of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the timing of the review of the statute, which was revised recently by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/57. However, OIOS believes that the Statute needs to authorize a representative of the Secretary-General in the Secretariat to ensure that the administrative decisions of the Director of INSTRAW are properly overseen in accordance with United Nations rules and procedures.

Recommendation 4

40. OIOS recommends that INSTRAW define what it considers a research product to ensure the significance, relevance and consistency of outputs (AH2004/540/01/04).

41. *INSTRAW stated that in accordance with its strategic framework of 2004-2007, the research activities in strategic areas include the following comprehensive outputs: (a) gender frameworks; (b) concept papers; and (c) case studies.*

Recommendation 5

42. OIOS recommends that INSTRAW implement its training strategy (AH2004/540/01/05).

43. *INSTRAW stated that the implementation of this strategy was already under way, with the first and second steps (mapping of existing training methodologies, tools, monitoring indicators and institutions) completed and posted on the Institute's website.*

Recommendation 6

44. OIOS recommends that INSTRAW consolidate data from its old and new websites to allow user access to the complete INSTRAW document library (AH2004/540/01/06).

45. *INSTRAW stated that it had consolidated the data from its old website and posted it on the new website since the audit in December 2004. Thus the data are now fully available to the public.*

Recommendation 7

46. OIOS recommends that INSTRAW improve controls over the use of consultants (AH2004/540/01/07).

47. *INSTRAW stated that funds were allocated to the Institute by the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, with the participation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for specific time periods ranging from one to five months. This often obliges the Institute to prepare contracts for consultants several times, even though the contracts relate to the same specific functions and are for a short period of time. INSTRAW also pointed out that the terms of reference for consultants were based on the specific needs of the Institute's programme of work and were not intended to replace staff members, in accordance with the provisions of ST/AI/1999/7. Consultants are also supervised by one or two staff members, according to INSTRAW.*

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
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